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Just as fresh sugar-coated cookies were hung, I looked up The Gap for my expected guests and counted seventeen adults and children,—only nine stockings, remember!

In fear and trembling I looked *down* The Gap to see if more were approaching, but I rose to the occasion and while my husband held their attention with the phonograph (the porch was filled) I hastily cut cake, and with two pounds of candy and three dozen bananas had something for everyone.

The hopeless, apathetic, lurid faces of those mountain women with their poor sometimes pretty children I am not likely to soon forget. They never laugh, and I could not tell whether they were pleased or otherwise. I have heard since that they never had such a Christmas, and the Colonel says they will talk of it for years, but at the time it was positively ghostly.

As I watched these mountaineers straggling along the side of the road to their dreary, oftentimes dirty, windowless cabins, I wished I could help ever so little, but they are so “sot” in their ways, the task would be a long, arduous one, if not absolutely hopeless.

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## IN ROOM NUMBER TEN

BY T. D. PENDLETON

THE night nurse entered the hospital, hung up her heavy ulster, walked up two flights, and reported to Miss Carithers at exactly five minutes before seven o'clock. Miss Carithers was to dine out and see a play, but she was still in uniform. She looked at the clock and gave the special orders for the night hurriedly. Finishing, she said she hoped the entire charge of the patients would not be too heavy. One of the day nurses would come over from the home and sleep in the hospital if the night nurse wished it. The night nurse did not wish it; she would be able to manage alone, she said.

Miss Carithers went away to dress, accompanied by a curious sense of bafflement. She felt as if she had tilted against a mist and lost. One could never get close to the night nurse, she was a machine. But at fifteen minutes before eight Miss Carithers came lightly to the top floor again and said contritely:

“I must tell you that an unpleasant thing has occurred. We had an emergency operation this afternoon while you slept, one of the victims of the wreck. You did not hear of the wreck on *The Southern*? Of

course you did not; you were sleeping. Twenty were killed and fifty or more injured. Most distressing was it not, on Christmas Eve?"

The night nurse said nothing and the other went on:

"The railroad hospital received the injured except one case they thought we might save. The operation was after all hopeless and the patient died at six o'clock. The undertakers were overtaxed (you know there are only three in the town) and they are short-handed because of the holiday so we . . . The body is still here. It is in 'Thirty,' at the end of the rear corridor. Of course the patients do not know; but you—you are sure you will not be lonely?"

The night nurse was sure. Again Miss Carithers sensed the baffling something that surrounded the other woman, and her voice took on its official tone:

"You will give Number 10 as much time as possible. He will die, I think; but if he should by any chance survive he would complete the doctor's record of one thousand successful appendicitis operations."

Miss Carithers went down the steps with a silken swish of petticoats and the night nurse began her eight o'clock round of "temperatures and nourishment." The hospital, open only to the doctor's surgical cases, was not large, and now because of the holiday season three-fourths of its rooms were empty, so the rounds were quickly made. Then the night nurse sat down in the diet kitchen and began her vigil.

The sound of a bell brought her to her feet. She knew who called without looking at the register dial. The single, apologetic tap had been impelled by no other force than the fevered hand of the little boy in Number 10. Within a fraction of a minute she stood by his bed. The appeal of the little voice was like that of the bell, self-deprecatory:

"Please mam, kin I have another swaller uv water?"

She deftly measured the prescribed "half-ounce of water when patient calls for it," and raised the little boy's head. In the light of her ten years' experience she read that Number 10 would not live. The ragged pulse, the temperature that showed on the chart as the trail of a snake—advancing, retreating ostensibly beaten only to double and crawl higher the next hour—told that the beautiful clean incision in the boy's side would not avail. Though marvellously accurate in line and depth, it had come too late.

The night nurse had not been on duty when Number 10 had been admitted; but she had had the story from the doctor's lips, a story quickly told in few words. The doctor was never wasteful of time. Perhaps he had got the habit of economizing time in the operating room where a minute more of anæsthesia might destroy his chance of

adding one more to his "record of recoveries." But in the choosing and using of the dozen or so words the doctor had shown the same sure touch with which he picked out and manipulated his shining knives, and he had etched on the brain of the night nurse a picture of a mountaineer in jeans bearing a stretcher contrived of hickory saplings and a homespun coverlid—a mountaineer who refused to lay down his burden at the hospital door, but strode in magnificent strength up the two flights to room Number 10 where he took eternal farewell of his "little feller." The picture had endured, and as the night nurse bent over Number 10 the too coldly classic lines of her face softened and her straight scarlet mouth curved to a tender flower. But the flower was a quivering flower and in her wide eyes was unrest; for the meagre words of the doctor had told more than the story of the little boy. The night nurse knew that the doctor fought with death in room Number 10 not with a zeal born of ambition to leave behind him a "record of successful cases," but with a passionate desire to give back to the big mountaineer his "little feller." The perfect machine alongside which she had worked these last years was human after all; and she who had gathered up the ruins of her life, stifling within her the palpitant thing that hurt and had in time come to a certain calm poise strengthened by the nearness of that other machine—How was she to go on alone?

Along with that palpitant thing that hurt she had stifled all thought of the man who had destroyed her, but now his image grinned at her even while she matched herself against death in room Number 10. It was the old, old story, the everlasting law of the contrary. The very brutality of the man's passion had appealed to her. His vows made at the altar had been broken within a month; but when she had come to the point where she in decency could endure no further he had wanted her as the boy wants the toy he has dissected. At the end he had risen to a certain compelling if brutal strength. "Leave me if you must," he had said, "but there is no going back for a woman like you. You are mine. I have put my brand on you."

There had been no going back for her. If thought of legal release had come to her, she had taken no action. What possible good could legal freedom work for her, a woman wearing the brand of a living man? . . .

Number 10 stirred; the light blue eyes set in the freckled face glittered fever-bright in the half light:

"O mam, kin I hev jest a mite moah uv watah?"

She held the glass until he had sucked the last drop.

"I'm afeerd I bother you a powerful lot, mam. I could do 'thout

the watah so often, ef hit wuzn't fer my dreams. Every time I shet my eyes I dream uv our spring at home. Did ye ever drink out'n a spring mam? . . . But I'm a botherin' uv yer agin. Don' pay no 'tenshun to my foolish talk."

The night nurse held the little fingers in her cool clasp:

"Dearie!"

The word came from her lips as the halting notes of a long-forgotten tune. The little boy went on:

"Our spring's right below our house, half-way down the side uv the mountin. Hit's got a gourd hangin' by hit; but in my dreams I don't take time to drink out'n the gourd. I jes lay down an' drink, an' drink! I'm terrible fond uv stayin' 'round our spring anyhow. My mammy she's layin' down below at the foot uv the trail, an' I kin see her grave frum the spring. Sence she's been layin' there they ain't nobody to home but me an' pappy—I know my pappy's terrible lonesome 'ithout me."

A bell summoned the night nurse and when she returned to Number 10 he was in the grip of delirium. The quivering flower of her mouth again became a straight scarlet line, and the unrest in the dark eyes fled before a steady purposeful light. Surely the working of a perfect machine is in its way a thing of beauty. Bells rang at short intervals; but the night nurse answered them with a speed that enabled her to spend nearly all her time with Number 10. As the night wore away and the little voice became weaker there grew in the woman a passionate protest against the going out of the boy's life. It was past midnight when she sank to her knees: "If he could be spared," she breathed.

Then she who had asked nothing for long years was gripped by fear. The boy would die. She would be denied if indeed she had been heard. Far better had she kept silent. Automatically she responded to the call of a bell. The dial of the register showed "30," and she sped down the rear corridor. Confronted by a closed door she remembered: in room Number 30 was the dead body. Of course the wires were crossed. Some other bell had registered "30," that was all; but she would go in to make sure. She switched on the light and entered room Number 30. All was in order. On the bed lay the sheeted body undisturbed. She closed the door softly and went back to Number 10.

The little boy was nearing the end now. It would not be in merciful coma, but in a struggle. She knew the symptoms. Again the bell summoned her. She must call help now; the little boy might die while she tended another patient. On the dial of the bell register "30" again stared at her. The wires were crossed surely. She must make a

note of it on the "repairs needed" memorandum. She released the indicator, but no sooner had it dropped than the bell sounded again, and the indicator revolved to "30" before her eyes. She turned to the speaking tube and summoned the doctor to come to Number 10. His house adjoined the hospital; he would be with her immediately, he said. All the time she talked through the tube the bell rang—a soft insistent peal as if pressed by a determined hand. The night nurse knew the wires were crossed; she did not wish to leave Number 10 alone a minute before the doctor's arrival—but without volition, as one under a hypnotic suggestion, she walked slowly down the rear corridor, entered room Number 30, approached the bed, and calmly drew off the sheet.

The doctor found her there in a storm of tears. He promptly took her in his arms, but she struggled to free herself:

"We must not; I must not . . . He was . . ."

"Hush! What matter who he was? He is no more, and life is ours."

Number 10 was not dreaming of the spring now. He dreamed of clouds, banks of white and pink clouds, soft as roses. He lay on them and rested until the ache went out of his lean little back. Then he heard music. He opened his eyes. The fever glitter was gone, and in the clear light of dawn they were the same small sharp blue eyes that spied squirrels in the tallest trees. By his bed stood a man and a woman, their hands clasped. Number 10 lay silent, listening to the Christmas chimes that sounded as if all the cows in the Blue Ridge neighborhood were wandering—at last he spoke:

"Ef you're the same lady that brought me sich stingy mites uv watah last night, you've growed powerful young since then."

At noon a notably cross member of the haughty clan of electricians clumped down two flights of stairs and banged the hospital door. In the street he vented his spleen on his assistant:

"Of all the foolishness! Sendin' a hurry call for a man on Christmas Day for *nothin'*! There wuzn't a thing on earth the matter with them wires. I tested all the bells over and over, and none of 'em would register any number but its own. It all comes of havin' wimmin runnin' things. Well," a sinister smile twisted his mouth as he took out his watch, "if people will be foolish, let 'em pay for it!"